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ABSTRACT

Rural communities with populations of under 15,000 are the least resilient to negative economic shocks, but local initiatives can reduce the negative impact of rapid economic change. Data from a study of three rural Australian communities and one "community-of-common-purpose" were used to develop a model of how the informal learning process inherent in community action builds resilient communities. Learning, social capital, and change are interlinked. The model identifies the resources used in the learning process, which are the resources that form the social capital of the community. These social capital resources are: (1) a knowledge of who can provide advice, support, information, and resources; and (2) identity resources, that is, a sense of belonging or willingness to act for the benefit of the community. The model illustrates that social capital is built as it is used. Informal learning interactions help people get to know each other and develop networks. They also build a commitment to the community and people's confidence to act for community benefit. Both quantity and quality of interactions have a role in the development of social capital. Qualitative elements such as shared language, shared experiences, trust, personal development, and identification with the community help build knowledge and identity resources and thus improve the quality of learning interactions. An understanding of the ways in which communities develop and use social capital as they learn will help build resilient rural and regional communities. (Contains 41 references.) (TD)

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# LEARNING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: A RESPONSE TO RAPID ECONOMIC CHANGE

**Sue Kilpatrick, Ian Falk and Lesley Harrison**

**Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia**
Faculty of Education
University of Tasmania
PO Box 1214
Launceston, Tasmania 7250
Australia
Phone: (03) 6324 3018
Fax: (03) 6324 3040
E-mail: Sue.Kilpatrick@utas.edu.au
http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au

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**Abstract**

*This paper explores the role which learning plays in community responses to external pressures, such as rapid economic change. A recent report by the Council of Small Business Organisations and the Department of Transport and Regional Development found that regional communities with populations of under 15,000 are the least resilient to negative economic shocks. Papers presented at the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia conference in June suggested that local initiatives and local actions can reduce the negative impact of rapid economic change on small rural communities. Such initiatives and actions involve the participants in informal learning through social interactions. These interactions draw on community social capital.*

*The Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia has studied the informal learning process which builds resilient communities and has developed a model to conceptualise this. The model applies to both geographic communities and communities-of-common-purpose, such as professional or business communities. The model identifies the resources used in the learning processes, which are the resources that form the social capital of the community. These social capital resources are (1) a knowledge of who and where to go for advice, support, information and resources and (2) identity resources, that is, being willing (committed) to act for the benefit of the community and its members. The model illustrates that social capital is built as it is used. The informal learning interactions help people get to know each other, and develop networks. They also build a commitment to the community, and increase people's confidence to act for the benefit of the community. An understanding of the ways in which communities build and use social capital as they learn, will help build resilient rural and regional communities*

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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A recent report by the Council of Small Business Organisations and the Department of Transport and Regional Development (Houghton, 1997) found that regional communities with populations of under 15,000 are the least resilient to negative economic shocks. Papers presented at the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia conference in June suggested that local initiatives and local actions can reduce the negative impact of rapid economic change on small rural communities. Examples include linking research to farmer training in the grains industry (Berrisford, 1998), using the internet in rural Canadian communities to expand small business opportunities (Bruce, 1998), and working with local employers to provide training for youth (Stokes and Wyn, 1998; Turner et al, 1998). Such initiatives and actions involve the participants in informal learning through social interactions. These interactions draw on community social capital and at the same time build additional social capital.

In this paper we first review briefly the literature on social capital and then describe the two research projects which provide the data from which our model of building social capital through learning (Falk and Kilpatrick, 1998) was developed. The following section presents the model along with examples from the data which illustrate the place of learning in building social capital. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the model for rural communities faced with the consequences of rapid economic change.

## What is social capital?

The concept of social capital appears in the literature as far back as Silverman (1935) and O'Connor (1973). This older literature treats social capital as an investment or cost incurred by government as it provides infrastructure, government services such as education and health, and public welfare programs (see for example O'Connor, 1973, p 101). More recently writers including Coleman (1988; 1990), Bourdieu (1991), Putnam (1993a; 1993b), Flora et al (1996), Narayan and Pritchett (1996), Offe (1998), Teachman et al. (1997), Falk and Harrison (1998) and Kilpatrick et al (1999, forthcoming) have written about social capital in its role as a resource, rather than as a cost. Social capital in this more recent literature is a resource which can be used along with physical and human capital to produce both economic and social outcomes. Coleman uses these words to show the differences between social and other forms of capital:

> Social capital...comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action. If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the relations among persons. Just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well. (1988, pp S100-S101)

Putnam (1993a) suggests that social capital in the form of networks, norms and trust facilitates cooperation for mutual benefit. Writers such as Putnam, Coleman (1988; 1990), Schuller and Field (forthcoming) and Cox (1995; 1998) all talk of social capital as a public good which enables a greater output to be produced from the stock of physical and human capital in a society. Better outcomes result when people use their knowledge and skills along with the knowledge and skills of others, through interactions which use networks, shared values and the commitment of others to the group. Putman's (1993a) study of Italy found that regions with a large number of small firms which engaged in a mix of competition and cooperation, where there was a high level of horizontal integration, were economically successful. The flexibility that came from high

horizontal and low vertical integration in the economy allowed the firms and their regions to succeed in a fast-moving economic world. Putnam's (1993b) paper is entitled 'The prosperous community'; community development literature recognises the necessity for social capital in building economically and socially viable and sustainable communities (for example, Topolsky, 1997). Other literature links economic development to building learning communities (for example, Brooks and Moore, 1997). Communities can be geographic communities or communities-of-common-purpose, that is professional or common interest communities, such as professional associations, networks of businesses and hobby clubs.

Putnam, Coleman and Cox speak of social capital as a stock which accumulates through use. Its networks, norms and trust are self-reinforcing. Social capital is the oil which lubricates social processes so as to enhance the outcomes of those processes in settings such as one-to-one interactions, interactions between groups, and within and between the institutions and organisations.

## Do learning processes produce social capital?

Work on the learning society emphasises the link between learning and responsiveness to change (Schuller and Field, forthcoming; Young, 1995). Adoption and change are learning processes during which people, individually and as groups (including organisations and communities), develop new knowledge, skills and values (Kilpatrick et al, 1998). The contemporary knowledge-based economy depends on active and effective learning processes (Argyris and Schon 1978; Senge 1990) which contribute to stores of social capital and so to social well-being and a civil society (Cox 1995; Offe 1998). The World Bank Policy and Research Bulletin summarises learning as "the acquisition of knowledge and information [which] is critical to economic growth" (1997, p 2). Thus, learning, as the assumed mechanism for building social capital, is and will be increasingly an important determinant of economic growth (World Bank Policy and Research Bulletin, 1997, p 3).

The role of formalised learning in the form of education and training in those functions which require adaption to change is well established (Kilpatrick, 1996; Sloan, 1994; Chapman and Stemp, 1992; Bartel and Lichtenberg, 1987). The role in the change process of informal learning which occurs in the workplace, the home and the community is less well researched, however. Cranton (1994) suggests that change can be triggered by new information which conflicts with an individual's previously accepted knowledge. A learning process follows during which values change and the new information is accepted. Lundvall (1992) proposes that change is a cumulative process which builds on existing knowledge and practices through interactive learning.

Interactions and sharing knowledge and skills are learning as described by Jarvis (1987). Learning is the 'process of transforming experience, of one kind or another, into knowledge, skills, attitude, values, senses [and] emotions' (Jarvis, 1987, p 90). The learning experience involves a 'direct interaction with other people, talking with them, watching their behaviour', learning from others' experiences, trials and errors and putting it into practice for themselves in a way that 'the individual tries out a procedure and finds that it works and can be repeated' (p 90). Learning in this sense is informal and experiential.

Social capital and related socio-economic outcomes are discussed at a macro whole community or whole nation level in the literature cited in the previous section. Yet the processes which use and simultaneously build social capital

must occur at a micro level. If social capital oils social processes in social settings such as one-to-one interactions, interactions between groups, and within and between the institutions and organisations, then study of such interactions should yield data on how social capital is both used and built. If social capital and learning processes both can lead to improved socio-economic outcomes, what is the relationship between learning and social capital?

In the remainder of this paper, we explore learning through interactions in several rural community settings. We examine how the interactions draw on what we identify as social capital resources, and how those resources are built through learning interactions.

In the following section we describe two research projects which examine how three geographic rural communities and a rural 'community-of-common purpose' build social capital through learning interactions.

## Research into social capital and learning in rural communities

Two of the research projects conducted by the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia study the building and use of social capital. Both are reported in more detail elsewhere, as noted below.

### Executive Link™

The first project is a study of Executive Link ™, groups of farm businesses whose management teams come together for regular structured (but not accredited) training. Each group consists of a number of Boards of around six member farm businesses and their owner/managers. The Boards provide management advice to their members, who are free to accept or reject that advice. Executive Link ™ is a community-of-common-purpose, whose shared purpose is to improve the economic outcomes of the member businesses.

Members must complete a prerequisite farm management training course. Meetings are held three times per year as residential workshops of three days duration. Each meeting has an experiential component based on members' business situations, and a training component, usually featuring an external trainer or facilitator. In the first component, farm businesses in each Board share information about the physical and financial performance of their businesses with the intention of learning how to better manage their businesses. Training topics in the second component range widely from self development topics such as positive thinking to management topics such as getting the most out of financial statements. Farm management consultants manage Executive Link ™ with the assistance of representatives of the members. Board membership is generally static, and new members are placed together in new Boards.

Most members of Executive Link ™, like the majority of Australian farm businesses, are husband and wife partnerships. Typically, all members of the businesses management team attend Executive Link ™ meetings. Being a member of Executive Link ™ demands being open to change, and requires a demonstrated commitment to training (the prerequisite course). From earlier

work on change and training in farm businesses (Kilpatrick, 1996) it is safe to say that the members of Executive Link™ are not typical of Australian farm businesses. Executive Link™ has been operating for six years. The group we observed is two years old. The life of each Board is planned to be three years. The organisers and original members are searching for options for members beyond three years.

We observed an Executive Link™ meeting, and conducted a focus group with 15 volunteers. Following the meeting, we developed a semi-structured interview questionnaire which we administered to nine volunteer members at their businesses.

The Executive Link™ project and its methodology are reported in more detail in Kilpatrick and Bell (1998) and Kilpatrick et al (1999, forthcoming).

**Three rural communities**

The second project is a study of three whole communities in rural Australia. All three centre on rural townships of around 2,500 people, all suffer typical rural Australian problems of unemployment, loss of youth to cities, remoteness, and shrinking commercial and government services among others. Purposefully different criteria were used in other respects. Community One is regarded as vibrant, active, go-ahead, empowered, attracting small business and government assistance. Community Two is virtually a single-industry town, while Community Three relies on small business catering to an annual influx of tourists.

The data from the three communities were collected from a combination of community texts, attendance at community meetings, interviews of key informants, and from a sample of 30 (on the average) community members. Analyses have been carried out using quantitative measures, along with a variety of qualitative analyses using ethnomethodologically informed conversation analysis. The notion of the inseparability and embeddedness of knowledge and values in mundane conversational practices is used in much of the research drawn on from this project in methodological and analytic respects (Jayyusi, 1991).

Various analyses of the extensive data collected from this project are presented in Harrison and Falk (1998), which focuses on qualitative and quantitative representations of the relationship between learning and social capital; Falk and Harrison (1998), which derives tentative indicators of social capital through a grounded theory approach using an intensively analysed single community as a case study; and Falk (1998a) and Falk (1998b) which focus on identifying some of the problems and challenges which arise as a result of perceptions about the relative significance of formal and informal learning.

## Social capital as knowledge and identity resources

From the data of both projects, we have identified two groups of resources used in the learning processes which together make up the social capital of the geographic communities and the community-of-common-purpose: (1) a knowledge of who and where to go for advice, support, information and resources and (2) identity resources, that is, being willing (committed) to act for the benefit of the community and its members.

1. *Knowledge* resources encompass knowledge of:

- the skills, knowledge and affective attributes (including values) of others in the community and outside the community;
- the common physical resources of the community including aspects of place, formal and informal networks, internal and external resources.

1. *Identity* resources are identifying oneself and others, inside and outside the community, as being willing to act spontaneously or on request. Identity resources:

- build a sense of 'belonging' and encourage participation;
- produce and reproduce identities of self, others and place as a product of various knowledges, skills, values and collective resources;
- provide the framework for people to re-orient their views of self and others in order to be 'willing to act' in new ways.

Knowledge and identity resources are used with human and physical capital. Knowledge resources allow community members to combine their skills and knowledge (human capital) with the knowledge and skills of others. It is knowledge resources that permit people to identify others with appropriate knowledge or skills, or with access to appropriate physical resources for a given purpose. Identity resources allow a community member to feel confident enough to ask another community member for information, advice or access to a physical resource. Identity resources also ensure that the other community member will act as anticipated, they will share the knowledge, advice or physical resource which is sought. We suggest that learning occurs not only through this sharing of resources, but also as community members reconstruct their identities and the identities of others, and extend their knowledge resources during interactions which use social capital. Thus social capital is dynamic, and is both used and built through learning processes.

In the following section we illustrate how knowledge and identity resources facilitate cooperative endeavours by oiling learning processes, and so lead to enhanced social and economic outcomes for the communities in our two projects.

## Knowledge and identity resources in action

Knowledge and identity resources are displayed in interactions, which both create and use knowledge and identity resources. Knowledge resources include knowledge of others in the community. In the following data sample from the geographic community study, both knowledge and identity resources are evident:

> ...so they know if I say I will do this for you, I will do it, and the same with them, if they have something that I am interested in, they will bring it in for me to read or they want to show me something... I know they will do it, so that's good, and that feeling of trust is very necessary in order to get on in life anywhere, whether you're in business or otherwise. (Community One member)

Knowing underpins the reciprocity which is then refined by qualitative dimensions: "I will do this for you...and the same with them". The element of knowing in relation to trust and commitment is evident as well: "I know they will do it...that feeling of trust". Evidence of the role of shared values or norms is

also shown in their mutual interest in something "for me to read or they want to show me something". The way that knowledge about these various activities mutually shapes identities is also indicated in: "I know they will do it". Identity resources, willingness to act, are also illustrated by the statement "they know if I say I will do this for you, I will do it".

The Executive Link ™ members said that getting to know each other and building trust were necessary before sensitive issues were introduced or discussed by members. Changes in these sensitive areas were the changes which permitted the businesses to make major improvements in performance. Once they got to know each other better, they started to refer fundamental problems or issues which required decisions to the group. Members had to get to know each other before they could regard each other as credible sources of advice and support. Getting to know each other is building knowledge resources. As people got to know each other, they developed a sense of belonging, and a sense that all group members could make valued contributions, that is they built identity resources. Members talked about the change in the nature and depth of problems and issues brought to the Boards over time:

> The group members are really getting to know each other a lot better. So... if they [have a blind spot] then most other people in the group can see that, and see through some of the things that they wouldn't have been able to see [before], because they didn't know the person as well before. [Executive Link ™ focus group]

> At the first couple of meetings ... everybody was so nice to each other. No-one's got any problems... whereas now, it's going [the Board is working]. The people who didn't have any problems have got the biggest problems. [Executive Link ™ member]

Identity resources include a sense of belonging, which encourages participation in the community. Participation in community activities provides opportunities for interaction, that is, opportunities for using social capital to enhance economic or social outcomes. The first quote below, from an Executive Link ™ member, illustrates how a sense of belonging influences attitudes and changes identity as the member comes to regard themselves as like others, instead of alone. The second quote provides an example of how a willingness to act facilitates sharing of human capital (people's skills and knowledge) which leads to an improved outcome.

> [It's] getting the big picture, how other people do it. You get the feeling that you are not just rowing your own canoe, there are others there doing the same thing... it makes it much easier to be positive. (Executive Link ™ member)

One member business was struggling to meet the information sharing and reporting back expectations of the group. Other members went to the members' property to help the business 'fit in' to the group:

> There was tremendous commitment to... go to that place... most of us were in the middle of shearing... I had to get people to do my work for me and the other members of the board were in the same boat, so it really was a crisis as far as the group itself went, so we just had to do it, and it worked really well and we all gained from it. (Executive Link ™ member)

Building as well as using social capital is evident in this second quote when the member says "it worked really well and we all gained from it". They gained an increased understanding of each other's skills, knowledge and affective attributes, that is they gained knowledge resources. Although not directly shown in the data from our two projects, it is quite possible that they also gained an

increased understanding of each other's formal and informal networks outside the community during the weekend stay at the member's property.

Analysis of a transcript from Community One illustrates how social capital is simultaneously used and built as the talk constructs and sustains the community. The transcript of talk that takes place in a rural doctor's waiting room between two community members, a general practitioner's nurse and a female patient who is regarded as a mainstay of the local community. The transcript was analysed for frequency of mention in eight categories of social activity. In the 138th turn of conversation between the two participants, are these words: "Oh, we're just having a little chat". The words are spoken as a kind of excuse to the male doctor, who has just entered the surgery. Most remarkable of all is that the "little chat", in a few short turns of conversation, has acted as a powerful device for demonstrating how social capital is built. In the 138 turns of conversation (a mere 69 pairs of talk), there are the following frequencies of mention in the eight reported categories:

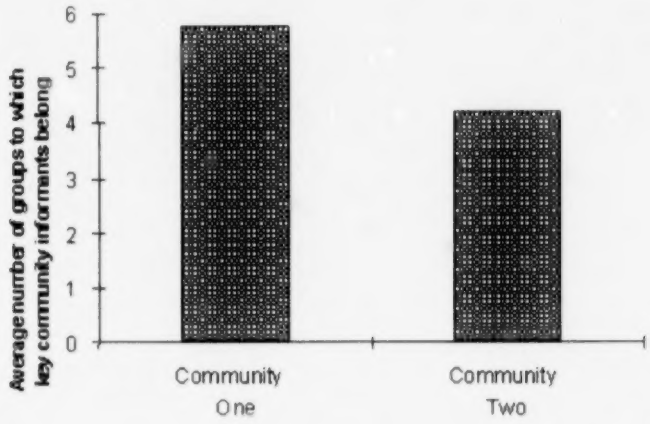
**Table 1:** Frequency of mentions of social activities in a conversation

| **Social Activity** | **Frequency of Mentions** |
|---|---|
| Institutions, associations, clubs and networks | 4 |
| Club/community activities/events | 5 |
| Individual skills, roles, achievements, things learnt | 11 |
| Key shared values expressed | 6 |
| Outside influences | 2 |
| Social issues | 2 |
| Personal events | 4 |
| Reminiscences, rememberings: Knitting the past and present | 3 |
| **Total no.** | **37** |

These 37 items, spread across 138 individual turns, represent a snapshot of the complexity of interaction and its outcomes in a community, yet are diminished by the participants on the entry of the dominant male to being simply "...having a little chat".

This community , which of the three studied has been the most adaptable in the face of economic change, has an extensive and interlinked web of community groups. The key community informants nominated by the community hold multiple group memberships, an average of 5.8 each, compared to 4.25 in Community Two (see Figure 1). We suggest that the cross-group activities of these key informants facilitate the sharing of knowledge resources across their communities, as well as building identity resources as described above.

**Figure 1:** Multi-Community Group Membership of Key Community Informants




## Interactions across the boundary of the community

Social capital is not restricted to within a community. Indeed, our data suggest that external learning interactions are essential if communities are to adapt and change. A community which has access to knowledge and identity resources from outside the community has a wider pool of social capital upon which to draw. Of the three geographic rural communities, Community One, which is regarded as vibrant, active, go-ahead, empowered, attracting small business and government assistance attracts the largest number of new residents from outside the community and outside the State (Harrison, 1998).

Identity resources are drawn on during interactions whose outcomes display a change in a person's agency. In the example below, the two turns of conversation, which took place at a craft group where bears are made, show the qualitative dimension of externalities (the trip to Sydney) at work on shaping identities of community: "...it's been really good" for the people from the State of origin, not just the local community:

> turn 288 ... someone told me you went to Sydney...
>
> turn 289 Yes, I went to the Premier Bear Affair which is held every year in Sydney and they had a huge competition there, which I must add that [people from our State] did exceptionally well in...they did exceptionally well, so you know it's been really good for the [people from our State].

External input to Executive Link™ is through a different external trainer or facilitator at each Executive Link™ group meeting. The various topics presented are used by the members in their business practices, and clearly contribute to increases in business profitability.

## Quality and quantity of learning interactions

Qualitative elements of interactions, such as externality, reciprocity, trust, and the importance of at least some shared norms/values, all show up in the data.

Frequency (quantity) of interaction may also be important for building and using social capital. While the research reported here does not provide a warrant for surmising about the relative importance of the differing frequencies and intensities of interactions in building and maintaining stores of social capital, it can be hypothesised that as the frequency and intensity drops, the stores of social capital may fall.

Not all interactions produce social capital. Experience tells us that social interaction might result in positive, negative or neutral outcomes. Refining the meanings of our terms, then, we would apply the term social capital to only the "good" products of interactions. "Bad" products would be something else entirely, and certainly not be called "bad" social capital (an oxymoron).

Our data suggest that the qualitative elements of interactions determine whether the product is social capital. Kilpatrick et al (1999, forthcoming) describe how the structured learning environment of Executive Link™ facilitates the building of community social capital. Executive Link ™ builds social capital by promoting shared language, shared experiences, trust, personal development and an identification with the community. Reciprocity, trust and shared norms and values are more likely to be seen in interactions in communities which have these experiences and attributes. Shared language, shared experiences, trust, personal development and an identification with the community help build knowledge and identity resources and thus improve the quality of learning interactions. These quotes illustrate how shared experiences and personal development build knowledge and identity resources.

> The character analysis and support work we do in the group the first time, ... Doing that character analysis is really good.... One of the members will say [something] and you think oh that's not really right, but because you know that character, you know that's why they've said it, you can understand them. (Executive Link™ member)

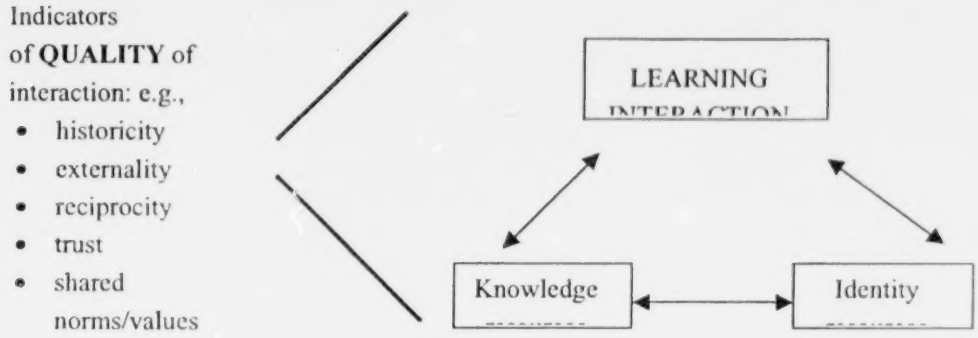
> When the people in the group become more familiar with each other, then they really start doing a role reversal so they give everybody else a go [at roles like facilitation and keeping the peace] to develop their skills in areas they weren't so certain in. (Executive Link™ focus group)

Informal learning in a community as it goes about responding to threats and opportunities such as those that follow rapid economic change can also promote shared language, shared experiences, trust, personal development and an identification with the community. Working on community projects, on lobbying government and preparing submissions provide opportunities for interaction where shared experiences occur and these attributes can develop.

## A dynamic model of social capital

From the analysis of the data of the two projects, we put forward a model of the process (Falk and Kilpatrick, 1998) which simultaneously uses and builds social capital.

**Figure 2:** Simultaneous building and use of social capital




The processes involved in the production of stores of social capital are identified as learning processes. The processes consist of the interactions between people and groups of people which lead to a change of some kind to the outcome of the collective activity. It is for this reason that we call the collective learning processes "community learning". These outcomes result from the interactive learning and contribute to the stores of social capital for a community. A whole community which displays the characteristics of community learning is referred to as a "learning community".

Social capital is produced and used in everyday interactions. The interactions only make sense in the framework of a set of purposeful community activities. The knowledge and identity resources, of which the social capital is comprised, are those which help the community achieve the desired outcomes. We propose the following definition of social capital:

> Social capital is the product of social interactions available for the overall benefit of a community-of-common-purpose. The interactions draw on knowledge and identity resources and simultaneously use and build stores of social capital. The nature of the social capital depends on various dimensions of the interactions in which it is produced, such as the quality of the internal/external interactions, the reciprocity, the trust and the shared values and norms.

# Conclusion

Learning, social capital and change are inter-linked. At the micro level of interactions, social capital in the form of knowledge resources and identity resources, oils the process of change to enhance outcomes. The process of change in a community is a learning process, which simultaneously draws on and builds social capital.

From our data from three geographic communities and a community-of-common-purpose, we suggest that *knowledge resources* encompass knowledge of the skills, knowledge and affective attributes (including values) of others in the community and outside the community; and the common physical resources of the community including aspects of place, formal and informal networks, internal and external resources. *Identity resources* are identifying oneself and others, inside and outside the community, as being

willing to act spontaneously or on request.

Knowledge resources allow community members to combine their skills and knowledge (human capital) with the knowledge and skills of others. Identity resources allow community members to feel confident that other community members will act to share information, advice or access to a physical resource if it is sought. The very process of community learning requires direct interaction with other people. The interactions of talking with each other, watching each others' behaviour, learning from shared experiences, the sharing action of offering support and help in completing a task, can all build knowledge and identity resources. These interactions occur within a social structure and involve action, consistent with Coleman's (1988) description of social capital. We suggest that learning occurs not only through a sharing of resources, but also as community members reconstruct their identities and the identities of others, and extend their knowledge resources during interactions which use social capital. Thus social capital is dynamic, and is both used and built through learning processes.

It can be said that social capital is dependent on the existence of numbers of meaningful interactions. Given that social capital can only be built in actual interactions, then a precondition to building social capital is the existence of *sufficient numbers* of interactions *of a particular quality*. Both quantity and quality of interactions therefore have a role in the development of social capital.

Qualitative elements of interactions include externality, reciprocity, trust, and at least some shared norms/values. Shared language, shared experiences, trust, personal development and an identification with the community help build knowledge and identity resources and thus improve the quality of learning interactions. More work needs to be done on the quality of the interactions. Interactions occur in many forms or channels or modes - spoken, written, verbal and semiotic (non-verbal) and any and all channels can generate social capital. But of what kind? Is, for example, learning through electronic networking sufficient without recourse to other forms of capital building?

There are many questions arising from the research which need to be posed, and these include:

1. Do all components (knowledge and identity resources) of a store of social capital get drawn on for all activities and purposes, or are only some components of the store used for different purposes?

2. What factors encourage the building of social capital?

3. Who might be the users of stores of social capital, and who might be interested in their use?

4. What features of the model developed so far are culturally specific, or not, and what does this say about the nature of social capital?

As an overall comment on the state and progress of work into social capital, it can be said that research so far has tended to suffer from incomplete or unformed conceptual work, and there is little or none, until the work reported here, specifically on the process work involved in building social capital. Focus on the process of building social capital will provide information about ways of facilitating that process.

Returning to the theme of learning and rapid economic change, we conclude with

the point that the informal learning which takes place as community projects are planned and implemented can build a community's capacity to survive in the harsh economic climate facing rural Australia in the late 1990s. Capacity to survive and even thrive comes through building social capital, and with it the capacity to share knowledge, skills and resources for the benefit of the community.

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